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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KHARTOUM 000418

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DEPARTMENT FOR AF A/S FRAZER, S/E WILLIAMSON, AND AF DAS
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PARIS FOR KANEDA

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SUBJECT: UFDD/F CALLS ON WEST TO SPONSOR DIALOGUE WITH DEBY

REF: KHARTOUM 00385

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Classified By: CDA Alberto M. Fernandez, Reason: Sections 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) The Union des Forces de la Democratie et du Developpement/Fondamentale (UFDD/F) wants Western governments to sponsor a dialogue between the opposition and the regime of Chadian President Idriss Deby, the movement's commissar for political affairs, Mukhtar Yaya, told Poloff in Khartoum on March 19. He emphasized that the UFDD/F holds a "Western ideology," prefers an "alliance with the U.S. rather than with Sudan," and wants a "peaceful solution" to its confrontation with Deby. Yaya suggested that the U.S., France or other Western power convene a "roundtable" of the Chadian opposition movements and the Chadian government, in a neutral location, so both sides can present their positions in the presence of international mediators.

¶2. (C) "We don't want to govern," said Yaya. "We just want a solution." He called on the West to "help the Chadian people" by facilitating negotiations that will change the character of the Chadian regime. "We're an oil state yet the country is mired in poverty and victimized by Deby." According to Yaya, the Chadian government has sent "delegations" to New York, Brussels, and Paris to outline its positions, but the Chadian opposition has no channel to pursue a political settlement outside of the African Union mediation, which is biased and has scarcely engaged with the rebel movements. Yaya said that France has not contacted the UFDD/F.

¶3. (C) Yaya at first indicated that Mahamat Nouri's UFDD and Ahmed Soubian's Front du Salut de la Republique (FCS)--the UFDD/F's alliance partners--are also open to negotiations. However, he later hinted that the UFDD may have a broader regional and Islamist agenda (not surprising given that Nouri seems to be the closest to the Sudanese regime), adding that "if Nouri doesn't want involvement from the West, that's his problem." He also acknowledged that Rally of Forces for Change (RFC) leader Timan Erdimi has "a personal problem" with his uncle Deby and is unlikely to pursue a negotiated solution.

¶4. (C) Though the Chadian opposition movements often claim they have support across ethnic and tribal lines, Yaya

admitted that the majority of the UFDD/F is composed of Missiriya tribesmen, and he claimed their forces numbered 2,000. He estimated that the alliance between the UFDD, the FCS, and the UFDD/F jointly commanded 5,600 fighters. (Note: While the Embassy cannot confirm these figures, they correspond with estimates from the UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS). End note.) The majority of UFDD/F forces crossed 150 kilometers into Chad in recent days, said Yaya, and are centered around Carfe, Am Timan, Salamat.

¶5. (C) Saying he would pass the request for Western-sponsored dialogue to Washington, Poloff explained that a new attack on Deby's government would lessen the probability of Western-sponsored political dialogue. Though Yaya seemed receptive to this argument, he cautioned Poloff--who he knew to be traveling to Chad on March 23--to return to Khartoum within one week because of the volatility of the situation.

Comment

¶6. (C) Like its partners in the "National Alliance"--the UFDD and the FCS--the UFDD/F asserts that its relationship with Khartoum is pragmatic rather than ideological. Yet while the UFDD/F continues to highlight the possibility of political compromise, Nouri and Soubian have staked out more hard-line positions focused on regime change in N'djamena. One explanation for the delay in the rebel offensive, however, is that neither the National Alliance nor Erdimi's RFC feel they can go it alone--either because of military strength or ethnic politics. Each is concerned about his other rival as much as overthrowing Deby. In this sense, Khartoum has been able to unite disparate elements that will almost certainly start squabbling (and fighting) sometime in the near future. Unfortunately for Chad and for stability, this breakdown in rebel unity seems most likely to occur once they have toppled

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the current regime. In this context, credible mediators may be able to bring some of the parties to a political dialogue, if only to delay or weaken the offensive that appears imminent (reftel) by peeling off some of Khartoum's partners in Chad's subversion. End comment.
FERNANDEZ